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FREE WILL

THE problem of free will appears to be a problem only because, as Bergson well says, the conditions are not clearly stated. It appears to the writer that the difficulty of stating the conditions is due to a hazy idea of the meaning of cause and effect.

The concept of cause and effect is based upon the experience which the intellect defines as "a succession in time." However, before this experience leads to a belief in cause and effect it must be repeated. The oftener it is repeated the more firmly do we apply to it the idea of cause and effect. Especially does this idea become firmly attached to "a succession in time" if we can repeat the succession at will in a laboratory. Really all that science means by cause and effect is a succession in time which can be repeated.

In consciousness, however, while there is what the intellect defines as a succession in time, there is no such thing as repetition. The proof of this is simple. We can do the same thing twice, but the consciousness of the doing is never the same because the memory of the first time is present the second time. It follows that in consciousness there is no such thing as cause and effect in the scientific sense because nothing is repeated. Consciousness is a continual creation of the unique in real time.

The object of science is correct prediction and this can occur only when there is a repetition of events. You can not predict the result of a first event, you can only observe that result and use your observation as a basis for predicting the result if the event is repeated. But, as in consciousness there is no repetition there can be no prediction, and this is what is meant by free will.

From the intellectual point of view a moment of consciousness is caused in the sense that it is preceded in time by conditions which determine it, but as these conditions are never repeated no prediction can be based upon them because prediction is impossible without repetition.

Hence the opposite views of free will seem to be due to two different concepts of the meaning of cause and effect. If we say that cause and effect means simply what the intellect defines as a succession in time certainly consciousness is caused and there is no free will. If however, we say, as science does say, that cause and effect means a succession in time which can be repeated, then, as certainly, consciousness is not caused and there is free will.

Looking at the matter from the later point of view, it is of course evident that few of our *acts* are really free, most of them being determined by habit or external stimuli, both of which conditions can be repeated.

A. A. MERRILL

LOS ANGELES.